



Testimony of
Sal Escobales, President
New Britain Federation of Teachers

Education Committee
March 14, 2018

***SB 456 An Act Concerning Assistance to School Districts that Enroll Students
from Puerto Rico who have been displaced by Hurricane Maria***

Good morning. Senator Slossberg, Senator Boucher, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Sal Escobales and I have been a Science/Biology teacher in New Britain for nearly 20 years, I am also the President of the New Britain Federation of Teachers, Local 871 and a proud home-grown son of New Britain. I am here to testify in favor of **SB 456 An Act Concerning Assistance to School Districts that Enroll Students from Puerto Rico who have been displaced by Hurricane Maria**. I bring you greetings from the city of New Britain, its Superintendent and Board, as well as its families and its students.

I am here today in support of SB 456 because New Britain needs disaster relief funding in support of the New Britain families. As a result of the destructive impact of Hurricane Maria, communities, and especially school districts are currently dealing with an influx of Puerto Rican students who have fled devastated homes.

If SB 456 is passed it can be a huge difference for our families and their students in the New Britain school system. As you may already know New Britain has a large Puerto Rican population, and as a result of Hurricane Maria, many people are moving from Puerto Rico to New Britain to start over. Many are staying with families and friends, until they can get back on their feet. While New Britain has come together as a community to provide support to the victims of this Hurricane, greater assistance and attention to this issue is necessary.

Other than serving my country in the US Army and Army Reserve in peacetime and wartime, I have spent all of my life in Connecticut. I know that we are a caring state. We have a proud tradition of responding to the needs of our state residents and the communities they live in, in bad times, natural disasters, etc. Unfortunately, I feel also compelled to remind us all that passing this bill would make a huge impact on those displaced families, all of whom for the record are US citizens and also many of whom are the family members of individuals who have proudly served their country, in times of need.

The arrival of these students has challenged local school districts such as ours that do not have the physical or financial resources to meet the demand. The New Britain School District alone has enrolled 205 new Puerto Rican students since the disaster. Many of these students speak little or no English and have significant emotional, physical, and financial needs. Therefore, our district has been asked to bear the significant financial burden of opening new classrooms and hiring additional Spanish speaking staff members to teach English, provide support, and meet the needs of these children. In addition, some of these students need to receive Special Education services.

- Based on the New Britain per pupil expenditure set at \$13,381 for 2016-17 (far below the per pupil expenditure in our DRG and at the state average level) we have made the following calculation regarding the cost of accepting hurricane victims into the New Britain School District based on the average taken from our highest population to the current level of active students:
- Regular education students:
181 students x \$11,151 = \$2,018,331 x 70% of year = **\$1,412,832**
- Special education students:
53 students x \$25,090 = \$1,329,770 x 70% of year = **\$ 930,839**

Total: \$2,343,671

Passing this bill would mean that we can continue to provide the quality education that we try to provide each and every day in the New Britain school district. In my current role as a teacher and science facilitator, I personally have met and worked with some of the displaced students. Hearing their stories of what has been lost has been heartbreaking. Many talked of being short of access to food and clean drinking water, prior to them coming to Connecticut. If this bill does not pass New Britain will not be able to keep up with the needs of these children and their families while guaranteeing the same quality of services and instruction for our existing students.

SB 456 will give New Britain a fighting chance and will allow us to better the lives of 205 students and their families. Let's show these children and their families that coming to Connecticut was a good choice and that we have their backs. I urge you to support this legislation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.